

# **LORD, INCREASE MY FAITH**

“And the apostles said unto the Lord, ‘Increase our faith.’”

Luke 17:5 KJV



**THOMAS BLACK**

**Lord, Increase My Faith**

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“This book is dedicated in the name of Jesus Christ.”

This book is written  
in memory of dad,  
Thomas Spratt Black, Sr.  
(1933-2015)

and

in memory of dad's sister,  
Mary Frances "Meme" Kelly  
(1935-2015)

and

in memory of dad's brother,  
Robert Leonard Black, Sr.  
(1942-2013)

and

in memory of dad's sister,  
Anne Black Wicker  
(1946-2010)

and

in memory of dad's brother,  
James Malcolm "Mack" Black, Sr.  
(1938-1995)

and

dad's brother,  
William Ernest "Ernie" Black, Sr.  
(1949- )

“The followers came to Jesus when he was alone and asked, ‘Why couldn’t we force the demon out?’ Jesus answered, ‘Because your faith is too small. I tell you the truth, if your faith is as big as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move. All things will be possible for you. That kind of spirit comes out only if you use prayer and fasting.’”

—Matthew 17:19-21 New Century Version

## CONTENTS

Chapter 1: They're My Neighbors

Chapter 2: I Am a Christian

Chapter 3: Show Me You, Lord

Chapter 4: Today's My Birthday

Chapter 5: Need Help. Down on Luck

Chapter 6: The Least of These

Chapter 7: The Levite

Chapter 8: The Samaritan

Chapter 9: The Man

Chapter 10: The Holy Spirit

Chapter 11: The Denarii

Chapter 12: A Good Friday

Chapter 13: A Good Man

Chapter 14: A Calling

Chapter 15: A Healing

Chapter 16: A Whisper

Chapter 17: A Moment

Chapter 18: The Motions

Chapter 19: My Name's Peter

Chapter 20: Killer Bees

Epilogue: Faith

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THEY'RE MY NEIGHBORS

During the summer of 2011, I was fervently typing chapters for the book I had begun to write—reflecting upon the words that Jesus had spoken in my vision: “. . . start telling the stories I will give to you.” God gave me faith stories to encourage other believers in their walk with God, stories that would leave both the believer and non-believer asking the same rhetorical question: “Was that God—or simply a coincidence?”

As I continued typing, another such story came to mind. It was told to me by Uncle Robert, my dad’s brother, in 2010 after I had preached at Dad’s church in Lancaster. Driving back that night Uncle Robert shared his testimony—and a story.

#### THE BOLT

“This was in my early days,” my uncle began. “In March of 1979 I gave my heart to Jesus; I asked Jesus to come into my life. And He did—in a big way that changed my life. I remember talking to a friend who had become a great friend; and my pastor, I remember talking to him too. My pastor said in the worship service, ‘If you want to know Jesus, raise your hand.’ So I raised my hand. I asked Jesus to change my life—to come into my heart. And it went on from there.

“My life wasn’t the best back then. Many people would have considered me an alcoholic. I drank every day. More than

that, there were a lot of things in my life that weren't right. But I knew that now I needed to lead a good and a godly life.

“I remember asking my friend, ‘How long have you been a Christian?’ He said, ‘It’s going on six years now.’ And I thought that was like a century—*six years*. I told him, ‘I don’t believe I can make it for two weeks.’ Well, it’s been close to thirty-five now—thirty-five years. And by the grace of God, I am what I am.

“In those early days I asked Him to fill me with His Holy Spirit—and I really believe He did. Though most days were just ordinary, there were other times that were . . . almost magical. Every morning I would get down on my knees and pray for *today*.

“My favorite prayer was, ‘Ask and you shall receive,’ because I had seen in the Scriptures where Jesus said it. I believed Him and so I asked—I asked Him to increase my faith. I had seen that even His disciples when they were in the boat coming across the water, Peter asked Jesus, ‘Increase my faith.’ Jesus said that if you had faith as a grain of mustard seed you could say to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and cast into the sea,’ and it would be done.

“Well my faith is little even today, because I’ve not cast any mountains anywhere. But Jesus would—if I opened my eyes during those days and those very weeks and months . . . and few years. If you *open your eyes* and you know in your heart that you prayed that morning, ‘Lord, increase my faith,’



that you are just looking for God to give you an opportunity to increase your faith. And He did it many, many times for me. Even the big ones *and* the little ones were miracles to me—and they *did* increase my faith.

“And on one occasion I had gone to Winnsboro to see a friend from high school whose father had passed away. The family had opened up their home for people to come by and visit—to give their condolences. Coming back home that night as I got to my driveway, I saw an older car with its hood raised sitting across the Dutchman Creek Bridge.

“After spotting the car, Scriptures went through my heart. Scriptures were saying, ‘If you see someone in need and it’s within your ability to help—you need to do it.’ So I stopped and went up to the people working on the car. There were two men in their twenties and one of their wives was holding a newborn baby. Water was pouring out of their car.

“One young man spoke up and explained their situation, ‘Our car runs hot a lot. We keep jugs in the car to get water when we can. We stopped at this creek to get more water. You see where the water hose comes off of the radiator and fits onto the motor, where the thermostat is located? The water is coming out from there. There are two bolts that hold it on the motor, and one of those bolts is rung off (meaning it was gone). Is there a mechanic somewhere that I could get my car fixed?’

“‘Well,’ I said, ‘Ridgeway is four miles back—and Great Falls is about ten or eleven miles forward. Probably the best bet

to get a mechanic would be in Great Falls because Ridgeway doesn't have a mechanic. But it's Sunday and they're not open—they won't be open until Monday morning.' And so that didn't help him.

"After a moment I said, 'Yesterday I was working on old lawn mowers on a picnic table in my backyard. I have bolts scattered all over that picnic table. Let's take out that one good bolt and see if we can match it to a bolt from one of those old lawn mowers.'

"The young man said, 'Okay, but there's no way it'll ever fit.'

"I said, 'We'll see.' And all during this time I was talking to them—talking to them about the Lord for the most part.

"It was dark now and all they had was a small flashlight. I first removed the good bolt; once I removed that bolt it was easy to get the broken piece of the other bolt out with a pair of pliers. I took the good bolt and the brother (not the driver of the car, but the other one) and drove up to my house.

"We took the bolt and walked back to the picnic table; he shined the flashlight on the table. We didn't have to search long to find a bolt that *looked like* the good bolt. We placed the good bolt beside it—it was *exactly* like the good bolt. We drove back to the car and put the part back together.

"I invited them to come up to my house and get some good water for their car. They didn't have to take creek water anymore. They filled their car's radiator with water and cranked

the car—it didn't leak! Everything was alright. And so the Lord had fixed their car. They were ready to go. Then the young man asked, 'What do I owe you?'

'I said, 'You don't owe me but one thing. At some point in your life you're going to probably come into a situation when you're going to need a lot of help—and help in this world won't do you any good—you're going to have to have spiritual help.' I had just read in Hebrews where it says, 'Consider Jesus.' And that's what I told him, 'When that time comes in your life and you don't know where to turn, all that you owe me is that you consider Jesus.'

'He said, 'Ok—we will.' And they left.

'These young people were from Cleveland, Ohio. They had driven to visit relatives near Jacksonville, Florida and were on their way back home when they broke down in front of my house. And after they got their car fixed, they drove on home to Ohio. So it would seem that the testimony ends—but not in God's eye.

'A few months later I drove out onto US 21 heading to Ridgeway. When I got to the last hill going into Ridgeway there was a car pulled over on the side of the road with its hood up. A man was tying a handkerchief onto the car's antenna. Still in my heart was the Scripture, 'If you see someone in need and it's within your ability to help, you need to do it.' And since this was within my ability, I stopped.

“I noticed as I pulled up behind the car that the man was from Ohio; I saw his car tag. I got out and asked, ‘What’s the problem?’

“He said, ‘You know—I ran out of gas. I *know*,’ he pointed, ‘I had enough gas in this car to make it to Columbia,’ about thirty more miles, ‘where I planned on getting gas. All I can figure is that as I was going up this hill, the gas ran to the back of the tank.’

“I said, ‘I have a friend who owns a gas station here in Ridgeway. He’ll let me borrow a gas can. Let’s go get some gas. We’ll put it in, and you can get back on your way.’

“He said, ‘I appreciate it.’

“So we did. He got in my car, and we went to Jackie McGuirt’s gas station. God bless Jackie—Jackie’s not with us anymore, but he was a good brother. Anyways, we went to Jackie’s station, got gas in a gas can, and headed back to the man’s car. And all during this time, for some reason, I was telling him the story about the young people breaking down on the highway: the bolt, the repair, their trip from Ohio.

“After we got to his car and put the gas in, his car cranked right up. Then I said, ‘I don’t consider things like this, our meeting this morning, I don’t consider these things an accident—that’s why I’ve been talking about the Lord the whole time. Who knows, God may have been trying to get your attention in everything that happened here today—your car running out of gas.’ The man hadn’t spoken a word from where

we met earlier until now. He finally spoke: ‘I know He did—I know He’s trying to get my attention.’

“I asked, ‘Now why do you say that?’

“He said, ‘You know those boys you were talking about that broke down?’

“I said, ‘Yes.’

“Staring straight ahead he said, ‘They’re my next door neighbors.’ Then he glanced over, ‘They’ve already told me about you.’

“So they were both from Cleveland, Ohio. Both broke down within a couple of miles. Neighbors who needed to hear about Jesus from an old country boy who was praying each morning: ‘Lord, increase my faith.’ And those meetings have increased my faith even to this day,” my uncle finished.

And after reading my uncle’s testimony I would share with anyone who feels their faith is still small, that Jesus said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?” (Matthew Chapter 7, Verses 7-10 KJV). No. We are all God’s children and whatever we ask for—if it’s a good thing for us—He will give it to us. And faith . . . that’s something He wants us to ask for so that we will all believe in Him more and more. And so ask . . . and ye shall receive.

## CHAPTER TWO

### I AM A CHRISTIAN

Uncle Robert's "bolt" story reminded me of the time I, too, was with a stranger. It was during my church's involvement in helping two communities in Nicaragua build a pedestrian walking bridge across a river in 2011, one that I chronicle in my first book, *Ten One-Dollar Bills*. I had travelled back to Nicaragua that May to help the Gavilan and Patastule communities pull the seven steel cables across the Bulbul River, the last big step in completing the walking bridge. Leaving the bridge site that Friday afternoon, I stopped and enjoyed a nice hot meal at Danilo's aunt's restaurant in the town of Matiguas. I sat and reflected back upon all that had been accomplished at the bridge site—at how close the Gavilan and Patastule communities were to finishing their bridge. I was visualizing crossing the finished bridge when it began to thunder. The billowing storm clouds, once in the far distance, quickly blackened the evening sky.

As the rain began pouring down, it became apparent that I wouldn't be walking to my motel room anytime soon. Danilo quickly finished his phone conversation arranging for my transportation to the airport the next morning. He stepped from under the covered porch, ran to the street, and frantically flagged down a taxi.

Danilo seemingly explained to the driver where I needed to go, then, motioned for me to come and get in. The street light across the road was burned out, which made it difficult to maneuver around the rain puddles. Getting to the car, I quickly opened the door; the car's dome light was burned out too. Nevertheless, I jumped into the backseat and slammed the door.

As the driver sped off, I noticed that most all of the street lights were burned out in this part of town. It was difficult for me to even make out the back of the driver's head seated directly in front of me. Then in an eerie moment I sensed another person seated in the backseat.

Finally passing by a working street light, I caught a glimpse of a silhouetted figure. A chilling fear instantly filled my body. I could smell the stench of my fear after every exhale. The thought of these two strangers beating, robbing, and dumping my body by the side of the road raced through my mind. For the first time in my life I was scared. I was afraid to even breathe. As we passed by another working light, I gave this stranger a quick once-over. Sitting next to me was a young man with a goatee and what appeared to be a slew of tattoos on his arms.

Suddenly he looked over and pointed to my chest, and in broken English asked, "You . . . Christian?" At that moment I froze and immediately thought—*why is he asking me that question?* I glanced down to see the small wooden cross on my necklace dangling outside my T-shirt. I had purchased this

necklace earlier in the week to show the workers at the bridge site that I was a follower of Jesus Christ. But now I found myself in the situation of a complete stranger calling me out on this fact. I frantically thought of how I should respond: *Would a “Yes” answer jeopardize my well-being? Or should I just answer “No;” after all, who else would ever know.*

Then I remembered the story in the Bible where Peter denied knowing Jesus three times—even after proclaiming to Jesus that he never would. Turning towards him I responded, “Yes . . . I am a Christian.” I waited for his reaction as the driver passed what I knew was the last street to my motel. There was nothing I could do but whisper a short prayer.

Then something unforgettable happened. The young man pointed toward his chest and spoke these words: “Me too.” And at that moment while sharing a ride in a car with a stranger who looked a little different from me, the rooster *did not* crow. Then arriving safely in front of my motel, we exchanged smiles and a firm handshake.



## CHAPTER THREE

### SHOW ME YOU, LORD

Uncle Robert loved people. He said that sometimes he would wake up at two or three o'clock in the morning and just start praying. One morning while he was praying, verses from the Gospel of Matthew came to mind:

“I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was alone and away from home, and you invited me into your house. I was without clothes, and you gave me something to wear. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me” (Matthew Chapter 25, Verses 35-36 NCV).

As evidenced by my uncle Robert's “doing” in Chapter 1, he lived daily by these verses. He knew that in the surrounding verses the King will say to the ones who did these things: “Receive the kingdom God has prepared for you since the world was made;” but to the ones that didn't (didn't give the food, the drink or the clothes, or visit when sick or in prison) the King will say, “Go away from me. You will be punished.” But in my uncle's later years, as his health continued to decline, he wasn't able to get out and see a lot of people.

## SHOW ME YOU LORD

“I felt bad,” my uncle continued, “so one morning I prayed: ‘Lord, here I am all alone out in the country and I see very, very few people. But would You please show me—show me you, Lord. Show me you when you’re thirsty. Show me you when you’re hungry.’”

“As I continued praying I heard that voice; for me it comes from inside—generally in a whisper. That voice said, ‘Robert, unless you do these things (talking about feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, or giving clothes to the naked) you will have wasted a good born-again experience.’ ‘Lord, because I’ve been born-again for thirty-five years, I don’t want to waste this experience. I want to do—show me Yourself.’ And later that morning I was given an opportunity.

“Now when opportunities come they don’t always dress up as a naked person or someone that’s skinny and needs something to eat. They come up—at least for me—as someone who’s in need; and you know for a *fact* they are in need. People say those who live in the United States are the richest people on the face of the earth and don’t have any needs, but there is always an opportunity when someone really *is* in need. Well, one of those opportunities came to me today.

“Someone’s house had burned down. I didn’t know them, but the friend I was talking with knew them. And I was able to go and help them out a little bit. When I arrived back home that

evening I said, ‘Thank you Lord—thank you for that opportunity.’

“Now when you’re doing it for the Lord you might not think you have enough money, but in the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 6, Verse 33 Jesus said to seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness and He’ll supply all your needs for you. And for over thirty-five years He’s done that.

“So if I ever rode by a person looking for (aluminum) cans to sell—digging them out of the dumpster—and didn’t stop and share a little bit of the wealth I have with him, to me that would be a sin; it would be. Scripture says, ‘Anyone who knows the right thing to do, but does not do it, is sinning’ (James Chapter 4, Verse 17 NCV).

“But when I do and I’m able to do—and God gives me eyes to see and I see—and I hear His voice saying ‘Do this’ and I do it, I’m the one who walks away with the blessing *every time . . . every time.*”

Author’s Comment: Robert Leonard Black, Sr. went home to be with the Lord on December 1, 2013.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TODAY'S MY BIRTHDAY

During a book signing for my first book, *Ten One-Dollar Bills*, a gentleman came and asked me to pray about joining a Christian men's organization. Christie, a member of the local Blythewood Gideon camp, had recently spoken at my church telling of this organization's work of placing Bibles in hotels, motels, hospitals and nursing homes. Praying and believing this to be the next step in my faith journey, I joined the organization in January of 2013.

The organization's South Carolina state convention was held that March. There I heard testimonies of individuals who after having received a Personal Workers Testament (PWT), accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and the resulting change in their life. A Personal Workers Testament is a pocket-size Bible that only contains the New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs from the Old Testament. These Bibles are easy to hand to someone in public and share the Good News with them, and it has the plan of salvation in the back. Handing out these small Bibles to individuals is also at the heart of this organization's work—sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

During the convention an announcement was made for each person to take two Personal Workers Testaments. We were instructed to pray over the PWTs, and witness to someone

during lunch. When the meeting adjourned I picked up two PWTs and hurried outside—getting into a large SUV with five other men.

Before leaving the driver made sure everyone had gotten their PWTs. Then he turned and said, “Let’s pray for God to show us the person.” So each man prayed aloud, asking God for His guidance in placing the PWTs.

After arriving at the barbeque restaurant in Lexington, one of the men immediately approached a young couple sitting on a bench waiting for other family members. I watched as he handed each a PWT and proceeded to share his faith; his approach was incredibly bold in my opinion.

Entering the restaurant I became increasingly nervous about openly sharing my faith. I tightly clutched the two PWTs in my right hand. I stood at a distance and scanned the items on the lunch buffet, all the while looking for a restaurant worker to whom I could give a PWT. Then my eyes became fixated on an older gentleman who was replenishing the meats and vegetables on the buffet. He suddenly looked up—his eyes locking with mine; I quickly turned and joined the other men at a table near the back of the restaurant.

When the waiter came to take our drink orders, Christie pulled out a PWT: “Do you own a GPS?” The young man thought for a moment before answering, “Yes—in fact I do.” Christie handed him the pocket-size New Testament Bible and continued, “Yours works in the horizontal plane—mine works

in the vertical plane. This one tells you how to get from here to there (pointing upwards) and how to have a good time along the way.” The young man smiled and thanked Christie before placing the small Bible into his pants pocket.

Later as everyone finished their meal, I again became nervous, knowing my PWTs were still safely tucked away in the inside pocket of my jacket. I encouraged the other men to leave to go pay before slipping into the sports-bar room of the restaurant. *My plan* was to give a PWT to someone in a more private setting—hoping it would be less embarrassing to me and that person. Surprisingly, there was no one else there; I stood and pretended to watch the news while I waited. A waitress finally passed by but seemed too busy for me to stop her.

After several more minutes, I lowered my head and prayed: “Lord, show me the person.” I stepped out and started walking towards the cashier, pausing for a moment to glance at the buffet; the older gentleman was still on my heart. Though only having looked into his eyes for a moment, I *knew* he was the one.

After maneuvering through the crowd of people exiting the line with their plates, I was finally able to look behind the serving station. There he was, busy refilling the items on the buffet. When he noticed me looking, he stopped and walked over. He spoke first: “Can I help you?” Now it was *my turn* to be bold.

"Has anyone told you they love you today?" were the first words out of my mouth.

"*What?*" was his reply initially.

"Has anyone told you they love you today?"—this time trying to speak a little clearer and with more confidence while showing him the PWT.

"My mother; she called and told me that this morning." He was now staring at the cover of the small book in my outstretched hand.

"Well . . . I love you and Jesus loves you too," I boldly stated while placing the small Bible into his open hands.

Now showing a hint of real emotion, he looked me in the eyes and continued the conversation. "Today's my birthday. Last week I told my mother all I wanted for my birthday was a small, pocket-sized Bible. When she called me this morning to tell me happy birthday, she said she had looked all over Lexington and couldn't find one anywhere. Now here you've given me one just like what I wanted, one that I can put in my pocket and read more about Jesus during my breaks. Thank you so much; you've made my day."

God's timing is always perfect; His hand is on *every single copy* of His Word.

Author's Comment: God was at work that Saturday. He knew the older man's need. He heard my prayer. And . . . He increased *our* faith.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### NEED HELP. DOWN ON LUCK

Caring for the needs of others is what I enjoy doing most. “My brothers and sisters, if people say they have faith, but do nothing, their faith is worth nothing. Can faith like that save them? A brother or sister in Christ might need clothes or food. If you say to that person, ‘God be with you! I hope you stay warm and get plenty to eat,’ but you do not give what that person needs, your words are worth nothing. In the same way, faith that is alone—that does nothing—is dead” (James Chapter 2, Verses 14-17 NCV).

Many times when travelling I will pray: “Lord, show me someone to help today.” On one such occasion I attended a funeral in Columbia and was returning home when I stopped at a gas station to fill up my truck. As I pumped my gas, I noticed a young woman sitting with her back against the station’s building. She had her head lowered between her knees while holding up a small sign made from the flap of a cardboard box: “Need help. Down on Luck.”

As I finished pumping my gas, I looked over at her one last time—*Lord, I see the person, but what can I do to help? I’m not a trained professional or a minister. What do I say to her, ‘God bless you.’* So I did what I had seen all the other people do, I simply passed by her—and drove off.



But sitting at a green light behind a tractor-trailer that was not moving, I smiled and turned left back into the gas station's parking lot—this was *purely* a step of faith.

I entered the side entrance to the store and stood there for a moment, contemplating what I should do for her. *I can buy her a bottle of water*, knowing several stories in the Bible where Jesus would satisfy a person's physical need before addressing their spiritual need. I walked over to the well-stocked drink coolers.

The moment I reached for a bottle of water another thought ran through my mind: *Is this what I would really want for someone to buy me?* I grabbed a twenty-ounce bottle of Coke<sup>®</sup> instead—immediately the classic TV commercial with its well-known tagline came to mind: “Have a Coke and a smile!” Then I saw a large assortment of candy bars; but thinking a candy bar might make a melted mess in her hands, I instead grabbed a pack of peanut butter crackers.

After paying for the drink and crackers, I walked towards the exit—*Now what am I going to say to this lady?* I said a quick prayer and these words came to me: *Tell her what I put at the end of my g-mail signature, if that Scripture is truly what I believe in my heart.* Going on nothing but faith and a prayer, I pushed the door open and stepped around to the front of the building.

The young woman was still sitting there with her head down and holding the cardboard sign out in front of her—*What*

*a sad sight.* More thoughts raced through my mind: *What if she's drunk or on drugs? What if she lashes out at me? What if someone I know is watching.* Putting all of these thoughts aside and trusting totally for God to take control of the circumstances, I walked until I was standing directly in front of her.

It took her a second to realize my presence—watching as she raised her head just enough to see what I was holding in each hand. She slowly put the sign down and reached out—one hand taking hold of the soda and the other grasping the pack of crackers. I took a slow, deep breath and boldly stated: “We should love people not only with words and talk, but by our actions and true caring” (1 John Chapter 3, Verse 18 NCV). She glanced up, looked me in the eyes and whispered: “God bless you.”

That night I prayed for this woman, that the simple act of kindness and words spoken to her might have lifted her spirit a little and given her a sense that she was loved by someone. And for me it breathed life into the Scripture I spoke to her.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE LEAST OF THESE

“The least of these” are the words used by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 25 to describe people in need—who may be a little different than us. Examples Jesus gave us in the parable included those who are hungry, thirsty, away from home, naked, sick, and in prison. In today’s society those differences might also include socio-economic status, occupation, and physical appearance. But *we know* that Jesus loves these people the same as you and me. Then Jesus stated the eternal implications for persons helping—or not helping—another person in need based on these differences. Ultimately the choice is each of ours to make.

The choice for me would come while waiting for my flight from Albuquerque, New Mexico to Dallas, Texas. Sitting at my flight’s gate inside the terminal, I watched a young man walk up to a well-dressed gentleman sitting at the end of the aisle. I could tell by the young man’s facial expressions and the whispering tone of his voice that he desperately needed something. The gentleman said a final, discernable answer: “No.” I watched the young man lower his head and walk away.

The young man stopped beside a nearby trashcan—looked around—and then peered inside. My instincts immediately told me he was looking for food. I turned and

asked the gentleman what the young man needed. “He needed money to buy something to eat. But who has the money to buy a plane ticket,” he continued, “but not the money to buy something to eat?” I thought about his analysis for a moment, looked over again at the young man, and abruptly stated: “I need to get something to eat.” I gathered my bags and walked to where the young man was standing—still studying the contents in the trash can.

“Hey, the guy over there said you need something to eat?” He looked up at me with a blank face. I immediately noticed the tattoos covering his arms and face. “Come on . . . let’s get something to eat,” I offered. With no other words spoken, he picked up his backpack and we began walking together. I shook off each stare as we walked through the terminal towards the food court.

After sitting down with our pizza slices and sodas, we introduced ourselves and began some small talk. His name was Stefan and he was from Taos, New Mexico. Last year his family business failed—and afterwards his marriage broke apart. For the past several months he had basically been homeless. He worked several odd jobs to save for the plane ticket to Boston, where he had family. He hoped to get a new start in a band; he had once played the electric guitar in a band in New Orleans.

Then his mood became more somber. “The hardest part is leaving behind my daughter—I love her so much.” I could

tell he was deeply troubled by this, so I pulled a pocket-size New Testament Bible from my backpack. I showed him the “help” pages in the front.

“Do you know why I took the time to help you?” the tone of my voice insinuating a rhetorical question. “It’s because when I saw you it reminded me of a young man that I didn’t take time to help.” Stefan briefly glanced up from eating. I continued: “It was a Wednesday night and I had just pulled into the church parking lot, when I noticed a teenager walking alone. Watching him walk to his car reminded me of myself as a teen—withdrawn. Then I heard God telling me to go and talk to him—but I didn’t. The following week that teenager . . . committed suicide.” Stefan was now staring intently into my eyes, seemingly trying to read my next thought.

“Stefan, I promised myself that if God ever showed me another person who needed help, I would stop and take time to help them.” Stefan’s eyes filled with water as he realized *he* was that person. “Stefan, no matter how bad you think your life is right now, God has a purpose and a plan for it; God loves you. You need to read and study God’s Word, pray, and work hard to get back on your feet. You need to stay in touch with your daughter to keep reminding her how much you love her.” Then I prayed with him.

After we finished eating he thanked me for the meal, and then gathered his bags. As he walked away the passage from the Gospel of Matthew came to mind, “I was hungry, and you gave

me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was alone and away from home, and you invited me into your house” (Matthew Chapter 25, Verse 35 NCV).

After recalling this story, the statement made by my late uncle Robert means even more: “. . . if you open your eyes and you know in your heart you prayed that morning, ‘Lord, increase my faith,’ you’re just looking for God to give you an opportunity to increase your faith.”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE LEVITE

My family's early summer vacation at Myrtle Beach had passed quickly. Packing for the return home, I saw the floor jack sitting in the back of my truck. At that moment I stopped and said a prayer: "Lord, show me the person you would have me to help today."

Traffic was bumper-to-bumper from the campground to I-95 that morning. Turning onto the on-ramp, there in the emergency lane was a woman standing beside a van. I noticed its axle sitting on the pavement and a fully inflated tire propped up against it. Now all she needed was a person with a low-profile floor jack—like the one in the back of my truck—to stop and help. But it was getting late and I was trying to stay ahead of the traffic—so I passed her by. (*And the rooster crowed.*)

Later that summer after my son's last baseball game in Charleston, South Carolina, I got stopped by the first traffic light leaving the field. I looked directly across the intersection and saw a truck parked on the right-side of the road—against the concrete barrier. A man was stretching jumper cables from his car, across the concrete barrier, to the stalled truck—they weren't long enough. I knew my new set of jumper cables would easily reach across, but I was in a hurry to get home—so I passed him by.

Later I was packing for the annual end-of-summer Harman family beach trip. Placing the last beach chair in the back of my truck, I looked and saw the floor jack sitting in the garage. I remembered taking it on the last trip to the beach and not using it—so I put it in the back of my truck. I stopped and prayed: “Lord, show me the person you would have me to help with this jack.”

My week of vacation quickly passed. My son and I left early that Saturday morning so we could pick up our dog from the veterinarian in Blythewood—to save the additional two-night stay through the weekend. Then in the driving distance I saw a man standing beside a truck on the side of the road. As we got closer, I noticed the truck’s axle was on the pavement. My eyes opened wide when I saw he was standing with a fully inflated tire—all he needed was a person with a floor jack to stop and help. I had one in the back of my truck. But being on a tight schedule to get back to Blythewood, I didn’t think I had even a minute to spare—so I passed him by. (*And the rooster crowed.*)

Then I remembered what Jesus told Peter in the Gospel of Mark, “I tell you the truth, tonight before the rooster crows twice you will say three times you don’t know me” (Mark Chapter 14, Verse 30 NCV). Not being obedient in following through with what was *plainly* the Lord’s answer to my prayer each time was—without a doubt—denying being a follower of Jesus. And like Peter, I began to cry.



Another parallelism for me is a story in the Gospel of Luke Chapter 10, where Jesus explains to an expert on the law what it really means to “love your neighbor.” In this parable we first see a priest (a Jewish religious leader) avoided the injured man on the side of the road. Then a Levite (Levites were members of the tribe of Levi who helped the priests in the temple) avoided the injured man. But the third man, a Samaritan (a people disliked by the Jews because they were only part Jewish and worshipped differently) stopped to clean and bandage the man’s wounds.

Then Jesus asks the expert on the law, “Which one of these three men do you think was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by the robbers?” The expert on the law answers, “The one who showed him mercy,” to which Jesus commands, “Then go and do what he did.”

Thinking back on my actions, or lack thereof, and then thinking of Jesus’ parable, I was most like the Levite, a person unwilling to be a neighbor to those in need, people Jesus had shown to me. And I felt like Peter, having been disloyal to Jesus and his teachings. But then I remembered in the Gospel of John Chapter 21, Peter is given an opportunity to restore his loyalty to Jesus. So I fell on my knees and asked for His grace and forgiveness. And just like with Peter, Jesus said: “Follow Me!”

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE SAMARITAN

It was nighttime driving back into Santa Fe, New Mexico when I saw an Arby's restaurant sign glaring in the distance. For some reason a thick layered roast beef sandwich sounded really good. Pulling into the parking lot, it appeared I would be dining alone— it *was* almost nine o'clock.

After ordering I walked around to find a seat and jokingly announced, "Now, where am *I* going to sit?" I took a table near the front door to see people as they came in. It was also near the counter so I would know when my food was ready, which thankfully didn't take long.

I had just finished eating my sandwich when a young man opened the door and walked straight over to my table.

"Do you have any spare change?" were the first words he spoke.

"Do you need something to eat?" I instinctively replied.

"No, I've eaten," he replied, "I only need a few more dollars to buy a motel room for the night."

"Why do you need money for a motel room?" I asked.

"I got on drugs," he continued, "and one night I needed money to buy more—so I robbed a man. I served time in prison. I'm clean now, but still no one will give me a job—not with an arrest record. So I beg all day for people's spare

change; when I get \$35 a motel owner sells me a room for the night—I get a hot shower, a warm place to sleep, and breakfast the next morning.”

“You do this every night?” I asked inquisitively.

“*Every night* for almost a year now,” he said with a somewhat gloomy expression.

I took out my wallet and gave him a ten-dollar bill. His eyes got a little glassy. Then I reached into my backpack and handed him a pocket-size New Testament Bible. “Do you know Jesus,” I asked.

He paused before answering, “I went to church when I was younger—but haven’t thought much about religion lately.” He allowed me to pray with him before leaving.

For the next several minutes I sat and thought about our conversation. Then I began watching a guy standing at the counter flipping through a handful of coupons. He asked the cashier about a specific coupon, looked back through the others, and returned to a table near the back. He repeated this two or three more times. Returning to the counter, I got up and walked up to him. “If you need something to eat, then I’ll buy you something to eat,” I offered. I then added, “So put your coupons away and pick out what you want.” And he did.

After he picked up his tray of food, we walked back to a table with coupon fliers scattered all over it. He quickly gathered them into a single pile. I let him sit down and start eating before starting a conversation.

“What’s your story?” I asked. He took a quick sip of soda and looked up, “I’ve been out of work and living in my car for almost a year now. At night I go to the post office and dig through the dumpster for fast food coupons.” I paused to gather my thoughts, not really knowing what to say next—as he continued eating his sandwich and fries.

“What kind of work did you do?” continuing the conversation. He quickly finished his drink before answering, “I was a licensed massage therapist . . . making really good money and living the American Dream: I had a house, a wife and a couple of kids. Most of my work involved standing for long periods of time—which caused an old football knee injury to come back and haunt me. I had to have surgery, causing me to miss a lot of work. When I was finally able to return to work I could stand only for a limited amount of time; this affected my performance. I was finally let go. Eventually I lost my home—and then my family. And now here I am, living on the street just trying to ‘get by’ until I can find another job.”

I walked out of the restaurant that night having gained a different perspective for people whom society labels as “homeless.” In fact, the two men I met weren’t much different from me—except for the fact that I have a full-time job and a loving family.

My third opportunity to be the Samaritan would be the very next day. At the end of the interstate exit ramp—leading to the Albuquerque airport—was a man standing and holding a

sign with these words: “Need food.” Getting stopped by the traffic signal, I looked down at my container of half-eaten fries. I quickly let down the window and held out the container. The man walked over and took it from my outstretched arm, at which time I boldly proclaimed: “We should love people not only with words and talk, but by our actions and true caring” (1 John Chapter 3, Verse 18 NCV).

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE MAN

I was driving to Winnsboro on a hot and humid Saturday morning when, on a straight section of Highway 321, I saw in the distance something near the road. Getting closer, it was a man standing with a backpack. I gave him a quick once-over as I passed by, assuming he was waiting on the transit system bus.

I spent almost an hour getting the brake pads for my daughter's car and making a few other stops before heading back home. As I approached the same stretch of road, I saw the man still standing there. This time I stopped, let down my window, and asked, "Where do you need a ride to?" His response was quick, "The bus station in Columbia." "I can't take you that far," I continued, "but I can get you closer than where you are now. Come on . . . get in."

The man's name was Joe—and he was going to Savannah where he had family. "I'm trying to get my life back in order," he stated. At that moment I pulled out a pocket-size New Testament Bible and said, "This Book can help you do that!" He smiled, "I know it can. I carry one right here," lightly patting his backpack.

After travelling a few more miles Joe looked over at me, and in a soft spoken voice said, "I really do appreciate this. You know . . . people don't stop and pick up black men anymore. I

had stopped counting the cars before you came along.” For a moment I was taken aback by his comment. Now noticing the time was after 11 a.m. I asked, “Can I buy you an early lunch?” “Sure,” he said with a slight grin.

Pulling into the gas station parking lot I felt a sudden sense of *déjà vu*—this was the same gas station where the young woman had been sitting against the building—holding the sign, “Need Help. Down on luck.” Getting out of my truck I stopped and wondered how long she stayed there after I gave her the drink and crackers. Then I smiled and started walking, knowing that what I do for people—no matter how small it may seem to me—is welcomed and appreciated by them.

Entering the restaurant the lady at the counter looked at Joe and then glanced at me. Even though we had walked in together I could tell she was afraid to ask if we would be *sitting* together. I helped her out by kindly stating, “We’re together.”

We sat and each opened a menu. I was studying the choice of sandwiches when I noticed Joe quickly flipping back-and-forth between pages—I sensed he was concerned with choosing an item that may seem too expensive. I finally spoke up, “I usually get the hamburger or the grilled chicken sandwich.” I could tell he immediately felt more at ease.

We each enjoyed a burger with fries and talked for almost an hour before finally agreeing that we both needed to get going. As I was paying, I noticed Joe glance at the bottles of water chilling in a bowl of fresh ice at the end of the counter. I

told him to grab one; he did—then thanked me and walked outside.

Joe struck up a conversation with a man standing on the sidewalk, so I didn't bother to say good-bye. Walking towards my truck, I drove off feeling good inside for helping Joe, a man who simply needed a small act of kindness.

I realize there are dangers when stopping to help a stranger. This is why—even after I've prayed for God to show me the person—I'm still cautious before stopping. My first concern is my family: I never give a stranger a ride if a family member is with me. Now this doesn't mean that I don't stop, but I may only offer to call for assistance. The second concern is for my safety: can I safely help this person? This could involve changing a person's car tire on the side of a busy highway, which may require taking additional precautions. And the final concern is for my life: am I willing to put my own life at risk to help a person in a perilous situation? And as spoken by Jesus, "The greatest love a person can show is to die for his friends" (John Chapter 15, Verse 13 NCV).



## CHAPTER TEN

### THE HOLY SPIRIT

The 2015 South Carolina state convention for the Christian men's organization I had joined was being held in Spartanburg, so I asked my birth mother, Nona, to pick me up at the hotel so we could have lunch. (I knew growing up I was adopted, and after waiting 40 years to begin and another 2 years of searching, I made contact with my birth mother in July of 2011, and we've kept in touch ever since.) So after receiving instructions for witnessing and praying, I rushed down the steps to meet Nona, who had already texted where she was parked.

During lunch I asked our waitress, "Do you have a GPS?" She stopped and looked at me—somewhat bewildered by the question. I held up a pocket-size New Testament Bible and continued, "This GPS, God's Plan of Salvation, tells you how to get from here to there (pointing upward) and how to have a good time along the way; and if you get lost it has 'helps' in the front to help you find your way." She flashed a smile and a "thank you" as she took the small Bible. As she walked away I turned back to Nona, who had a big smile on her face.

We arrived back early from lunch, so we decided to sit in the hotel's lounge area to talk more. As we were talking Nona suddenly exclaimed, "We need a picture!" She stood up and

canvassed the room before walking to where a large family was seated around a table. For a moment Nona conversed with the family, and then the young man at the far-end of the table stood up. Nona handed him her phone and showed him which button to press. I got up, and we posed for a quick picture.

Back at our seats, I opened the box of Girl Scout cookies Nona had brought me. We had each finished eating one when I decided to share them with the family and young man who took our picture. Nona and I both commented on the friendliness of this family, and I reached into my duffle bag to grab a copy of my book, *Ten One-Dollar Bills*, to share with them too.

I walked over to their table and shared the cookies with the young man and his family. Then I handed my book to the girl seated closest to me. She looked down and read the book's cover, but before she could speak I said, "I wrote it. It's based on a mission project where my church helped two communities in Nicaragua build a walking bridge across a river." At that moment her grandfather took slight hold of the book, turned it towards him, then said, "*Ten One-Dollar Bills* . . . I like that title; it sounds interesting." I simply smiled and walked away.

Nona and I were in steady conversation when I caught a glimpse of an older gentleman standing nearby—observing our conversation. It gave me an eerie feeling. Then Nona pointed out to me that it was the grandfather holding my book. Knowing this I struck up a conversation. He moved closer as I began speaking.

“The story of the ten one-dollar bills comes from when my mother was in the hospital losing her battle with cancer. My great-aunt came to the hospital that week and handed me a card with a bunch of dollar bills tucked inside—ten one-dollar bills. She said, ‘You’re going to be here all week, and you can’t always find change for the drink or cracker machine.’

“I had never shared that story with anyone until I shared it one evening with my wife. I told her that I felt led to give ten one-dollar bills to a friend who was recovering in the hospital from a motorcycle accident—and I did. But that’s all I’m going to tell you, except later in the book that same family’s church made a donation to the Nicaragua bridge fund.”

At that moment the man sighed and sat down on the armrest of the chair beside me. Then he lowered his head and said, “My wife passed away from cancer six months ago.”

“Oh—I am so sorry,” leaning more towards him and placing my hand on his knee.

“It’s alright. I’m 82 years old,” the man said slowly standing to his feet. “Now I’m going to start crying,” glancing away while walking back to rejoin his family at their table.

I sat there for a moment trying to understand the conversation that had just occurred between the man and me, when the chairman of the Christian men’s convention walked up and informed me that the presenters for the afternoon were meeting upstairs in five minutes to have prayer. Nona and I

quickly finished our conversation and said our good-byes at the bottom of the stairs.

I met with the other presenters in the second floor meeting room. We stood and held hands in front of the podium, each man taking a turn to pray for the meeting. I still felt nervous since I had never officially spoken in front of this Christian men's organization. I tried to feel at ease by reminding myself that my presentation wasn't the first after lunch—giving me more time to pray, gather my thoughts, and reel in my nerves.

The first presenter went over his allotted time, so when he finished I was quickly introduced. Standing at the podium, I took out my notes and glanced over the room filled with professional men in suits. Thankfully the hours of preparation were enough that I didn't have to read from my notes verbatim. I also finished within my allotted time—giving the announcer a reason to smile as I exited the stage and returned to my seat.

As the next presenter began, my mind drifted back to the older gentleman (the grandfather) I had met downstairs. I got the strongest feeling he was coming up the stairs to talk with me more about my book. No doubt—it was the Holy Spirit at work.

So when the speaker finished and it was time for the afternoon break, I quickly stepped into the aisle and walked towards the exit door. Before I could reach the door Tim, the organization's state president, came through it and—seeing

me—ecstatically stated, “I’ve got someone who has copy of your book and wants to talk with you.” Out from behind him stepped the grandfather. I greeted him with a warm smile.

Sitting down to talk, I asked him if there was anything he needed for me to pray with him about. He said, “No,” and then with a firm voice stated, “I’m 82 years old and I’ve never met anyone who is as genuinely honest and nice as you.” He took out the book I had given his family and said, “I’m going to read your book.” We talked a few more minutes and—as quietly as he entered the room—he got up, shook my hand, and exited.

I sat there for a moment and reflected on his words. It was humbling for someone his age to tell me he had never met anyone “as genuinely honest and nice.” I was also humbled because I knew that my conversations with this man were prompted by the Holy Spirit; I was simply doing what I felt led by God to do.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE DENARI

In previous chapters I wrote about two characters in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan—the Levite and the Samaritan. Each time when I saw someone in need there was but a moment to choose which role I would play. I learned to always be praying so as to react without thinking. And when I allowed my mind to guide in making the decision, those times—more often than not—I played the role of the Levite, the person in Jesus' parable unwilling to help the person in need.

To play the role of the Samaritan, I must first be willing to give my time to stop and help a person. This truth cannot be demonstrated any better than by the lady who, at the end of a Sunday morning worship service, stood in front of the church congregation and holding up her arms, showing everyone her missing hands, stated, “One night my boyfriend, in a violent rage, cut off both my hands and left me beside the road for dead. Now I cannot drive. I depend on someone else for everything—to take me to get the medicines I need and take me to doctor appointments. And the one thing I now know is that people will give you their money . . . and people will give you their advice, but people will *not* give you their time.” The lady stood there for a moment, seemingly waiting for someone, including myself, to raise their hand to help. But no one did.

And not only must I be willing to give of my time (including vacation time from work) to help someone, but often I must also be willing to give of my money. For the lady in my church, money in the form of fuel for my vehicle. And in Jesus' parable the Samaritan gave the innkeeper an amount equal to two-days wages (about \$125 in today's dollars) to take care of the man's room and expenses. The Samaritan was following through in helping the man in need. I was recently told a story by Eddie, a Christian friend and church member, of what it means to help in such a way.

#### AN OPPORTUNITY

Eddie began, "My friend John was in Walmart standing in the checkout line. A young military couple with two children was checking out, placing their stuff on the conveyor at the register. They were paying with what appeared to be WIC (WIC is a federally funded program to support low-income Women, Infants, and Children). And then they kind of looked bewildered; they were \$40 short. John was standing right behind them and told the cashier, 'Just ring it up . . . I'm going to pay for it.' So he gave the extra \$40 they needed to pay for their groceries.

"John said while he was checking out, he noticed out of the corner of his eye the family was standing near the exit doors—off to one side. After he paid for his stuff and as he approached the exit, they stopped him. The wife spoke first: 'I've got to ask why you did that?' John knew this was a perfect

opportunity to witness to somebody, so he said, ‘I serve a God that is bigger than any problem—and He has blessed me so much and commands me to do for others. So when the opportunity arose to do, I did.’ And John started witnessing to them about the Gospel and Jesus.

“The wife started asking John all of these questions. The husband was standing farther off to the side, just listening. Finally John said, ‘You can have exactly what I have—all you have to do is ask for it.’ And the wife inquired, ‘How do you ask?’ And John said, ‘You pray what I call the sinner’s prayer—and that leads you into salvation.’ Then the husband grabbed John on the shoulder and spoke up, ‘Can I have that too?’ So John gathered the couple around him and started saying the sinner’s prayer—and led them both to Christ.

“When John had finished leading them in prayer, he stopped and looked around. Standing behind him were two gentlemen he didn’t even know; they had been praying for him while he was praying with this couple.

“The opportunities in life—you have to be able to see them. Sometimes we don’t *see* what God has put in front of us. But that day John saw it and then followed through on what God had put in front of him. For a small sacrifice of his time and a small monetary gift, John led two people to Christ that will now have an eternity with Him.

“And you may not think about it,” Eddie continued, “but \$40 to this couple that day and at that moment was everything.



To John it was two bills in his pocket—it wasn't that big of a deal. And John challenges each of us to 'put \$20—somewhere in your wallet that you're not going to spend on yourself or your family—and when God shows you an opportunity, you never know how it might be used to lead someone to Him.'”

Now after reading Eddie's story, the question you may now have is, “How can I invite Jesus into my heart and life?” If you desire to accept Jesus as the Savior and Lord of your life, then pray the following:

*Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for loving me. I believe with all my heart that you are the Son of God and that you died on the cross for my sins. I know I have sinned. I ask you to forgive me. I turn away from my life of sin and selfishness and receive you as my Savior and Lord. I want to learn to love you, trust you, and serve you. Thank you for coming into my life. I pray in your name. Amen.*

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### A GOOD FRIDAY

On Sunday March 29, 2015, I gave a report on the work of the Christian men's organization at St. John United Methodist Church in Columbia. Being the fifth Sunday of the month, it was a combined service of the three churches which the Reverend John Jordan pastored. A covered dish meal followed the service.

During lunch I sat and ate with an energetic young couple. We talked and seemed to share a lot of the same interests—including having a heart for mission work. Then Samantha, the young woman, mentioned the need for 500 small Bibles for a Good Friday event being planned at the Christ Central Ministries on North Main Street in Columbia.

The event was being called “Good Food. Good Feet. Good Friday!” with the tagline, “A community comes together to serve the footcare needs of the homeless.” The event was being spearheaded and sponsored by Donna, the owner of Mrs. GoodFoot nail salon in Columbia. Samantha continued by explaining what started as a vision to wash one man's feet had grown to a community coming together this year to serve the homeless in Columbia.

I left the church luncheon with the excitement of having an opportunity to participate in a local mission event. That

afternoon Samantha texted the link to the Good Friday event's Facebook page and Donna's contact information.

After reading Donna's newest Facebook post, she anticipated only needing 200 of each item for the "blessing bags,"—which meant fewer Bibles were needed. Items already donated included socks, ChapStick<sup>®</sup>, gum, snacks and bottled water. I added a comment about donating the Bibles for the event; Donna and another person quickly "liked" that comment.

On Good Friday the homeless received human compassion by having their feet washed and cared for, getting basic oral hygiene, and then being given a nice care package filled with "love." Upon exiting the church building each of them then received spiritual care—a copy of God's Word and prayer. In my eyes this was an incredible mission event. That Friday, 85 New Testament Bibles were handed out. Five men prayed to receive Jesus into their hearts as their Lord and Savior. It really *was* a Good Friday.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### A GOOD MAN

On Friday May 15, 2015, I arrived at the Columbia Metropolitan Center to participate in the annual South Carolina Book Festival, hoping to share the need for pedestrian walking bridges in developing countries with a broader audience. I was directed to drive around to the rear of the building. A man who worked at the center helped me unload two boxes of books and display materials onto a dolly.

With everything unloaded I reached into my truck for a Personal Workers Testament, then turned around and asked him, "On a scale of zero to one-hundred—if you died today—would you go to heaven?" He paused, and then stated, "I think so. I'm a good man." I looked him straight in the eyes and said, "Billy Graham is a good man, but only through the shed blood of Jesus Christ is he washed clean of his sins, and that's the only way to everlasting life with Jesus in heaven."

After quoting several Scriptures I turned to the back of the PWT and read John 3:16—inserting his name in the text, "For God so loved 'Tyrell' that He gave His only begotten Son, that if 'Tyrell' believeth in Him that 'Tyrell' should not perish, but have everlasting life." When I finished I looked up and asked Tyrell if he wanted to invite Jesus into his heart. Without

hesitation he said, "Yes." So right there on that loading ramp Tyrell prayed and received Jesus into his heart and life.

Then I asked, "Is there a local church where you can attend?" He replied with a gentle smile, "I sometimes attend the Christ Central Church on North Main Street." "Were you at the church on Good Friday when they were washing people's feet?" I excitedly asked him before continuing, "I was there passing out Bibles and praying with each man and woman as they exited the church." Tyrell thought back for a moment, "I wasn't able to make it that day."

And with Tyrell's last answer I knew that I was where God meant for me to be that day, doing what He called me to be doing—sharing my faith and the Good News.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### A CALLING

It was early in 2010 when I began asking myself, “Am I called to go help two communities in Nicaragua build a walking bridge across a river?” Though definitely interested in all of the challenges, I knew that just committing to go to Nicaragua meant I had placed one foot out of the boat. Now I prayed for God to show me a physical sign, a “call,” for me to step out of the boat and walk out onto the water—to go and help build this bridge.

As I questioned being “called,” one person immediately came to mind: the Reverend Billy Graham. Surely for Billy Graham to have dedicated his whole life to serving the Lord he had to have been called. Then I remembered reading of one of his daughters being asked about her father’s unwavering, lifelong commitment to serving the Lord, and her answer simply being: “Daddy was called.” But how did Reverend Graham know he was called by God?

The answer to that question would unknowingly come the following weekend as I began watching the DVD movie *What Would Jesus Do*. Its previews included a movie titled *Billy—The Early Years of Billy Graham*, a documentary of the early years of Billy Graham’s life and ministry. I purchased and watched the movie the following week while sitting in my truck

during my son's hitting lesson at the baseball field in Blythewood.

The beginning of the movie was very solemn—depicting an older Billy Graham wearing a black trench coat and polished black shoes walking slowly towards the camera. It was a simple—yet somehow powerful—opening scene. When the movie actually started it showed Billy Graham's daily life on his family's dairy farm. The next major scene was him attending Mordecai Ham's tent revival in Charlotte, North Carolina. The movie then shifted to his college experiences at the Florida Bible Institute.

In one classroom scene at the Bible college, the young Billy Graham was asked by his professor to preach in a local church. In the movie as he began preaching, my eyes unexpectedly swelled up with tears. I hit pause and wiped the water from both of my eyes. I sat there for a moment trying to understand my sudden onset of emotions, knowing there was nothing sad about what I was watching. After a few minutes I pressed play to continue the movie.

The scene that followed occurred during a Bible class. As his professor lectured, Billy Graham raised his hand and asked, "Who becomes an evangelist? Is desire enough? Or is it a matter of devotion?" His professor stopped and became more serious before answering, "It cannot, and must never be, about the money—and fame. It's about . . . the call. It's about serving the One that died for you. It's about *His* message."

Suddenly at that moment I felt a large body of energy come down and cover over my entire body. Then it squeezed tightly, like a person giving me a big hug. Tears began streaming uncontrollably down each cheek. I reached down and stopped the movie, and then looked straight up and yelled out, “GOD, WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL ME . . . ARE YOU CALLING ME TO PREACH?” And as unexpectedly as it came over me, the energy lifted. I had never experienced anything like that before in my life—nor have I since. And over a year would pass before I would understand the meaning of that encounter.

During the first meeting with my birth mother, she shared many details about my biological family tree. There are branches with Sunday school teachers, Sunday school directors, and preachers. And there’s one branch with a family of evangelists that includes *the one featured in the DVD movie!*

Now I finally understood what God was telling me the first time I stopped the movie—“Thomas, this man is part of your family.” And then the second time . . . “I *am* calling you.”

Author’s Comments: On page 10 of Billy Graham’s autobiography *Just As I Am*, he mentions taking family vacations “. . . with Aunt Ida and her husband, Tom Black (Thomas F. Black\*), and their several kids, including cousin Laura, who was more like a sister to us.” Billy Graham’s cousin, Laura, is my biological grandmother.



\*I am named after my adoptive dad, Thomas S. Black, who is not related to my biological great-grandfather, Thomas F. Black.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### A HEALING

During my last visit with my uncle Robert, he shared with me a book written about the life of my great-grandmother, Sally Francis McCorkle. She was his and my dad's maternal grandmother. This book was written and presented to all of her family by the Lando Church of God on October 26, 1969.

#### THIS IS YOUR LIFE SALLY FRANCIS McCORKLE

Sally Francis Small was born June 10, 1890 in Kershaw County. Her parents were George and Henrietta Small. There were four sisters and two brothers in this family. They moved to Pineville when Sally was four, and she attended school there. As most children did in those days, Sally started work in a cotton mill at the age of eleven. She had to stand on a box to reach her work. One of her old friends stated, "She was a top notch spinner when she came to Lando at the age of fifteen."

Mrs. McCorkle did not have much formal education, but the knowledge and wisdom she has gained through the years would make many college professors envious of her.

Sally was a very pretty young girl. Her dark hair was teased much as we wear ours today. (They called it tangled.) She wore hers bouffant with a little bit pulled down over one side of her forehead. Sally was very petite and always looked neat in her clothes. The skirts had already started getting

shorter—about four inches above the ankle—but Sally was a little daring. She wore hers about two or three inches shorter, which probably made some of the older ladies raise their eyebrows and talk about mini-dresses way back in 1907. They must have wondered what would become of this young generation.

Sally was a very witty young girl with a good personality. She had many lasting friends—two of which are still living near Lando and have been kind enough to share some of their early experiences with us.

Mrs. Small was a very nice woman with a great big heart, much as our own Sally is today. She had one determination, though, and that was to keep Sally too young for any young man to be interested in. This accounts for the fact that Sally was fifteen when she moved to Lando, and three years later she was still fifteen. This did not fool young John McCorkle for long, and he started meeting this pretty young girl at a friend's house. One night Mrs. Small suspected what was going on, so she went visiting the friend's home to tell young John off. He politely walked mama home and before they got home, he had won his prospective mother-in-law's heart. He had her permission to visit her daughter, and she confided she didn't know what he wanted with her, she couldn't even cook a cake of corn bread. Being the diplomat he was, John replied, "I'm glad because I don't like corn bread anyway." Having permission took about half the excitement out of dating, so

Sally and John decided to get married. This too had to be sneaky. One nice cool Sunday in March, 1908, Sally and her father were sitting on the porch. He told her when she decided to get married to be sure and let them know. “I will” replied Sally. She went straight to her friend’s home where she had carried her wedding dress earlier.

Sally was very pretty in her blue and white dress as she and John, along with a number of teenagers, started the long walk across the trestle and up the railroad track to Preacher Lummus’ house. “That was the longest wedding ceremony I’ve ever heard,” said Mrs. Lottie Thorpe. “We kept expecting Mrs. Small to run in any minute and stop the wedding.”

The happy couple went to Mineral Springs on their honeymoon. When they came home, the Smalls were very happy with their new son-in-law.

John and Sally moved to several towns in the area after their marriage, but finally in 1923, they settled in Lando for good.

There were six children born to this fine couple. They are Tessie Bailey, Earl McCorkle, Mae Black, Robert McCorkle, Ben McCorkle, and Henrietta Hefner. Even though there were the normal problems that go with raising a family of this size, there was the most important thing of all—unselfish love that only a woman like Sally could have for her children and husband. No sacrifice was too great for them. Her beloved John was king of her home, and as one of her children said, “His

wish was her command.” This she did, not because he demanded it, but because she loved doing things for the people she loved.

Her husband passed away in 1958, after 51 years of happy marriage. Sally would have been lost without John had it not been for her children, grandchildren, and many loyal friends. But there was an emptiness that no one could fill, until one day she found another who became king of her life—one whom she could work for and give her undying love to; one who promised to be a father, a mother, a brother or sister to all of us. He has proven this to Sister McCorkle.

I’ll never forget the one afternoon Doris Harrelson, Gladys Hough, Clineth Snell, and Temmer Ramsey went to visit Mrs. McCorkle. As we read the Bible and prayed, Sister Sally dedicated her heart and life completely to God. In her own words as only she can put it, “I thought I was saved all this time, but now I know it. I never did anything against God, but I wasn’t doing anything for him. I was just oozing along. I am so happy.” This became an expression we all loved and looked forward to hearing in all our services.

Since becoming a member of the Church of God in Lando, Sister McCorkle has been faithful to God and her church. She has done more than her share for our Willing Workers, always volunteering to do anything to help. Just to see her in church makes us feel good. Sally always has a smile when she comes to church regardless of the way she feels. One

Sunday I remember, she came to church when she could not hear nor could she speak she was so hoarse. Yet she was there filling her place and encouraging her pastor. A group of ladies led her to the prayer room and asked God to heal her. Before we finished praying, Sister McCorkle said out loud, "I can hear everything you say." Similar things have happened on many occasions as we prayed with her. Her faith in God is so real and child-like.

We don't understand why God did not heal Sister McCorkle's foot; but we do know that all things work together for good to them that love God and to them who are the called according to his purpose (Romans Chapter 8, Verse 28)\*. Someday we will understand. Then Sister McCorkle will say it was worth it all, and she'll say *I am so happy!*

\*We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him. They are the people he called, because that was his plan (Romans Chapter 8, Verse 28 NCV).

Sally Francis McCorkle passed from this life on March 27, 1974.

NOTE: The information about the early part of Sally McCorkle's life was told to Temmer Ramsey by Lottie Thorpe and Bell Yarborough.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### A WHISPER

My uncle Robert passed away unexpectedly on Sunday, December 1, 2013. Leaving my uncle's funeral that following Saturday, I was deeply saddened knowing he would never read my book containing many of his stories. He would never know that his personal testimony inspired its title. As I approached the I-77 overpass bridge and put on my left turn signal, I wiped my tears and prepared myself for the short drive home from Ridgeway to Blythewood.

Then my thoughts went back several months to the Wednesday night after visiting my uncle to record his stories, when I heard a voice . . . a whisper: "*Go to Lexington and buy a lottery ticket.*" I'm not sure where those words came from, but I heard them as clear as if someone were sitting beside me and speaking them. Then I thought, *Was that my conscience?* But at the moment I wasn't in any danger or even remotely thinking about the lottery. As I continued that night turning onto the on-ramp to the interstate I said out loud to myself, "I'm *not* going to Lexington to buy a lottery ticket," and I drove straight home.

The next morning it was all on the local news. The Powerball jackpot winning ticket was sold at a gas station on Highway 378 in Lexington.



The following week I read a devotional that explained the difference between the voice of your conscience and the voice of God. If you are doing something and you hear a small voice tell you something related to what you are doing, then that's your conscience speaking to you. But if you hear a small voice tell you something that's totally unrelated to what you are doing, what you are seeing, what you are hearing, or what you are consciously thinking at that moment . . . that's the voice of God. The voice of God is the voice my uncle Robert had mentioned hearing when telling me his stories, and it came to him as a whisper. And driving home that night, God's voice spoke to me . . . as a whisper.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### A MOMENT

A moment: an instant when you own the stage or experience the thrill of being in the world's limelight. "A moment you own it" catchphrase emphasized by a young rapper. Or "give me one moment in time" cliché made popular by a number one hit song. But what happens when that "moment" fades? What happens when the "band stops playing?"

My moment was helping two communities in Nicaragua build a walking bridge across a river, and then writing the book detailing my incredible faith journey of raising the money and building the bridge. But after the celebrations ended, I found myself thrown back into the routines of everyday life. The two tasks that had filled so much of my time and taken so much of my energy were slowly becoming a part of my past. I longed to experience it all again, but as the weeks passed, an emptiness began filling my body. I angrily asked God why He hadn't opened another door.

Finally, more than eight months later I realized that I was trying to open the next door on my own. I stopped and asked God for forgiveness, and then prayed for Him to show me the door. And He did . . . the very next weekend!

At a book signing event in Blythewood, a gentleman asked me to join a Christian men's organization that was

founded on placing Bibles in hotels and motels. And it's through the work with this organization that God has allowed me to experience even more moments. Stories that I have shared with others—and now in the book you are reading.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### THE MOTIONS

“The Motions,” the special song I had chosen in 2010 to sing at the end of a sermon titled “The Faith Message.” I first performed the song at my dad’s church, Jones Crossroads Baptist, in Lancaster. Later in that summer of 2010, Reverend Ben Newman, then pastor at Sandy Level Baptist Church in Blythewood, asked me to sing “The Motions” to compliment his *Living on the Edge* sermon series. The song also represented the recent mindset change in my own life—which was to stop going through the motions of life and to start living out my life for Jesus and His purpose for it.

That Sunday in 2010 after singing the song’s first verse and chorus, I felt as if the words were flowing from my inner soul; I could *feel* the Holy Spirit stirring inside of me. I briefly looked up at that moment to catch any reaction from the congregation—only the normal looks. Then finishing the second stanza and starting the chorus for the second time, I glanced up again—but this time not a single person was looking at me. Continuing to sing the chorus, I slowly scanned over the congregation. I was in awe. Each person was in a trance—sitting perfectly upright and staring straight ahead with their eyes wide open; not even a child was moving in his seat. It was a surreal moment.

I know the Holy Spirit comes and lives within each and every born-again believer in Jesus because Jesus' disciple Simon Peter sermonized, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission (forgiveness) of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit)" (Acts Chapter 2, Verse 38 KJV). And by Jesus himself when He says, "But when the Holy Spirit comes to you, you will receive power. You will be my witnesses—in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria, and in every part of the world" (Acts Chapter 1, Verse 8 NCV). But I had never personally experienced anything like what I saw that Sunday morning. It was like the old saying by many church soloists, "Listen to the words I am about to sing and not the way I sing them," had rung true that Sunday morning. It also reminded me of Paul's words to the people of Corinth, "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians Chapter 2, Verses 4-5 KJV).

The lyrics of "The Motions" speaks of giving our all for Christ and of being His witness to others, while also emphasizing that we, as Christians, need to stop simply going through religious routines. And as in the words of my uncle Robert, "Lord, because I've been born-again for thirty-five years, I don't want to waste this experience. I want to do—show me Yourself."

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### MY NAME'S PETER

The plane's pilot announced for everyone to "sit back and enjoy the flight." His statement took my thoughts back to my first trip to Nicaragua. During that flight I had asked the Lord to provide me with a sign that He was calling me "out of the boat" to help build bridges in developing countries. *Now* my prayer was for Him to give me confirmation that He was calling me to join hands with other Christian men in giving out His Word on the streets in New York City. After praying, I smiled and thought: *Now what kind of sign could God possibly give me in New York?*

After landing at the LaGuardia Airport, I quickly grabbed my bags and headed outside. Being outside affirmed what the street map had indicated—the hotel sat directly across the main highway from the airport. I contemplated my options: taxi, bus, or feet. I decided to save a few bucks and walk.

I carefully maneuvered through the airport's multiple lanes of waiting cars and taxis. The many years of playing *Frogger* on my Atari<sup>®</sup> video gaming system had finally paid off, as I safely made it across to the airport's parking lot. I scanned the landscape for a crosswalk and, not seeing one, started walking along the parking lot's fenced perimeter beside

the eight-lane highway. I eventually concluded that there was no way to safely walk from the parking lot to the hotel.

I started walking back towards the airport to get a taxi. Before crossing through the waiting traffic, I stopped for the crossing signal to change. Then it occurred to me: *If I can find a ride in Nicaragua, surely I can find a ride in New York City.* At that moment a man started waving people across in front of his stopped “mom-van.”

Being the last person to cross I shouted, “Hey, are you waiting to pick someone up?” He leaned out his window, “No, I just got back to New York and am heading home.” “Can you give me a ride to the hotel over there?” pointing to the building towering above the highway. “The one over there?” he asked—looking around me in the direction I had pointed. “Yes,” now getting the feeling he was actually going to give me a ride. “Come on . . . get in,” he said with a confirming hand motion.

I hurried around and opened the sliding door on his van, threw my luggage on the floor, and closed the door. I quickly opened the passenger door and jumped in the front seat. “I really appreciate this,” trying to break any tension in the air—that of a complete stranger now sitting in his van. “Glad to do it,” showing me a slight smile.

Driving away from the airport he asked, “What brings you to New York?” Fully expecting this question I quickly answered, “I’m here this weekend with a Christian men’s group. We are speaking in churches and handing out Bibles on

the streets, at fire departments, and in prisons.” “Well,” glancing over, “welcome to New York.”

As we approached the hotel I reached for my wallet. Sensing my intentions, he immediately said, “No! You’re not paying me anything for this.” Hearing the sincerity in his voice, I instead reached into my carry-on bag and took out a copy of my book, *Ten One-Dollar Bills*. “I will give you a copy of my book then,” quickly signing it before placing it on the floor between the seats.

I had just finished telling him about the bridge project in Nicaragua when we pulled into the hotel parking lot. Getting parked, he took out *his* wallet and pulled out a bill. He looked over and said, “This is for your church.” Totally humbled, I reached and gently took the \$20 from his hand. I thanked him for the ride and the donation, and then extended my hand, “By the way my name’s Thomas, what’s yours?” Firmly grasping my hand he squeezed it slightly and said, “My name’s Peter.”

After he told me his name I was speechless. A few seconds later I looked him in the eyes and asked, “Do you believe God gives us signs when we ask for them?” And with a stoic face he answered, “Yes . . . I do.”



## CHAPTER TWENTY

### KILLER BEES

A few weeks later while writing, my thoughts went back to another time when God had answered prayer. This story was told by my Nicaraguan friend, Danilo, during my second trip to Nicaragua. He took me to the location where the accident occurred.

With me videoing, Danilo began retelling the story. “A year ago, there was an accident with two children. The children were over there waiting for the milk truck to come by to pick up the milk. The milk comes from a farm where their dad works. They milk the cows, bring the milk here, and wait for the truck to come get the milk.

“It was really windy and bees were flying all over the place—because the wind irritates them. So the two kids, Vicente and Meiling, were here waiting. The bees were everywhere. And one bee stung the boy on his cheek; he swatted and killed it. But then the rest of the bees came and attacked the kids.

“The children fled towards the farm; but the hives were over there below those trees. So instead of running away from the bees, they ran right to where they lived. The children were attacked by thousands of bees. And they, in that instant, fell down in a faint. Their father was over there and called to

Vicente. The father and uncle wanted to get the children out; but they couldn't get to them because the bees attacked them too.

“After a bit they figured the children were dead—because they weren't moving; you could see they weren't moving. So they called the firemen. The firemen came, and when they saw that the children were not moving, they said, ‘The children are dead. Why go and get them out? They are already dead.’”

About two hours went by before Danilo was called; he was in Managua at the time. Danilo said that he prayed a quick prayer and then exclaimed to the caller, “Those children are not dead. Those kids . . . you need to get them out. Those kids are alive!”

“And then others started to pray,” Danilo continued. “In Managua, my parents, other old people, and friends to whom I talked, prayed. Even brother Mike (Sandy Level’s Nicaragua mission team leader), who was in the United States, was praying for the children. So, after two hours of being attacked by the bees and lying there, Vicente lifted his arm. That's when the firemen realized the children were alive: ‘We've got to get them out!’

“The firemen went into the midst of thousands and thousands of bees. The children were rescued and taken to the hospital. The little girl, Meiling, recuperated. But they thought the little boy, Vicente, would surely die. They took him to a

hospital in the city of Boaco, where he stayed fifteen days. The doctors all said Vicente was going to die. He was badly swollen. But with the prayers of many brothers, God heard. And today they are alive—*they are alive!*

“It's been a year since that accident, and we thank God the children are alive. They can tell the story that God is real—and God lives just as they do—and He's here to help us every day. I think most people, who have perhaps never seen or known about an accident like this, would find it really difficult to see two children . . . to see them nearly dead . . . and then later to see them live. I believe only God can do a miracle like this. He's God, and He does miracles daily in our lives.”

Author's Comments: During this second trip to Nicaragua I actually met the two children in Danilo's story. They appeared perfectly healthy and showed no effects from the bee attack.

Note: You can watch the video I took of Danilo telling this story at the location of the accident on YouTube by searching *biblesnoopdog Killer Bee Miracle Story* video.

## EPILOGUE

### FAITH

In my first book, *Ten One-Dollar Bills*, I tell of a vision: *At the age of 60, I died and went to Heaven. I found myself face to face with Jesus. Looking into my eyes, He asked me one question, "Twenty years ago I gave you this vision, and now, who have you helped in the past twenty years?" Thinking back, my eyes quickly fell away from His face; my head hung low as I answered, "No one, Lord . . . no one." He simply said, "Then go back and start telling the stories I will give to you, tell others about Me, and help as many people as you can."*

The stories you read in this book *are* the stories He has given me. These stories serve as a testimony to my faith, a reminder of God's faithfulness, and, prayerfully, an encouragement to others.

Many non-believers say the accounts in the Bible are "just a bunch of made-up stories." Admittedly, they may say the same for the stories written in this book. But whether it was God who divided the Red Sea to allow the Israelites safe passage as told in the Book of Exodus or God who protected the two children being attacked by killer bees in Nicaragua as detailed in the previous chapter, my belief that God did *either* of these miracles comes down to one word: FAITH.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas Black is Vice President of Engineering at Fairfield Electric Cooperative in Blythewood, South Carolina. He is a member and deacon at Sandy Level Baptist Church in Blythewood. He and his wife, Cynthia, are the parents of two grown children, Shelley and Jordan. In 2012 he published his first book, *Ten One-Dollar Bills*, in which he tells of his experiences while serving as the project coordinator for the Gavilan-Patastule Suspended Bridge built near the town of Matiguas in Nicaragua.

## BACK COVER:

In his first book, *Ten One-Dollar Bills*, Thomas tells of a vision: “*At the age of 60, I died and went to Heaven. I found myself face to face with Jesus. Looking into my eyes, He asked me one question, ‘Twenty years ago I gave you this vision, and now, who have you helped in the past twenty years?’ Thinking back, my eyes quickly fell away from His face; my head hung low as I answered, ‘No one, Lord . . . no one.’ He simply said, ‘Then go back and start telling the stories I will give to you, tell others about Me, and help as many people as you can.’*”

*Lord, Increase My Faith* is an inspirational book containing these stories—real stories that *will* increase the faith of the reader. This book is a testimony to Thomas’ faith, a reminder of God’s faithfulness, and, prayerfully, an encouragement to others.

In the book’s final paragraph Thomas writes, “Many non-believers say the accounts in the Bible are ‘just a bunch of made-up stories.’ Admittedly, they may say the same for the stories written in this book. But whether it was God who divided the Red Sea to allow the Israelites safe passage as told in the Book of Exodus or God who protected the two children being attacked by killer bees in Nicaragua as detailed in this book, the belief that God did *either* of these miracles comes down to one word: FAITH.”

REVIEWS:

“I finished reading this book. All I can say is *WOW*. Thanks for showing me the way and being my role model.”

—Jordan, son

“Started at the beginning and read straight through, only stopping to cry, reflect, and re-pray your prayers. Beautifully told stories.”

—Nona, mom